

STATEMENT

Of

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On

HR23

A Belated Thank You to the Merchant Mariners of World War II Act of 2007

House Committee on Veterans Affairs

Mr. Chairman and members of the Veterans Affairs' Committee

It is indeed an honor to be able to express our views on HR23, the Belated Thank You to the Merchant Mariners of World War II Act of 2007. We are here because we were not treated the same as the other services at the end of WWII. We have found we had the highest death rate of any of the services. Our death rate was 1 in 26, the Marines were 1 in 32, the Army 1 in 48, the Navy 1 in 114 and the Coast Guard 1 in 408. Does that sound like we were civilians? Apparently the enemy didn't think so. As my friend, Captain Matt Drag states, "At no time during the war was I called a civilian; only afterwards". He also wrote, "On Pearl Harbor Day, I was third officer aboard an American Merchant Vessel. At this time I held a commission as Ensign in USNR. At the first port of call, I reported to Naval headquarters for duty, I was told 'Stay where you are. That is where we need you'. So for following orders, I was cheated out of my Veteran recognition and benefits. Not only this, but for my service to my Country, I am insulted by being termed a 'civilian'."

At the Missouri Valley Merchant Marine meeting in Des Moines, we were told there were about 36 of us in line to be sworn into the Navy. An officer came by and said "We need three of you to step out of line and join the Merchant Marine." Look how unfairly they have been treated since the end of WWII compared to those that stayed in the Navy.

At the time of attack, the Merchant Marine had to supply one or two men to assist the Navy Armed Guard. When the war ended the Navy Armed Guard walked down the gangway veterans. The Merchant seamen on the same ship were not considered veterans.

If Congress would have followed the law at the end of WWII, I don't think we would have to be here today. I am referring to the Merchant Marine Act of 1936. It states the United States shall have a Merchant Marine serve as a naval or military auxiliary in time of war or national emergency. We did our part. Did the government honor their part? No, they did not. I ask you with the history you know, did we serve as a naval or military auxiliary in WWII? President Roosevelt thought that we did and asked Congress to do likewise for the men of the Merchant Marine when the GI Bill was passed. Our military leaders felt the same way. I'll quote our military leaders of WWII. General Dwight D. Eisenhower said "When final victory is our, there is no organization that will share its credit more deservedly than the Merchant Marine." Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz said "The Merchant Marine...has repeatedly proved its right to be considered an integral part of our fighting team." General A. A. Vandergrift said "The men and ship of the Merchant Marine have participated in every landing operation by the United States Marine Corps. from Guadalcanal to Iwo Jima – and we know they will be on hand with supplies and equipment when American amphibious forces hit the beaches of Japan itself...We of the Marine Corps. salute the men of the Merchant fleet." Field Marshall Sir Bernard Montgomery stated "Their contribution was just as important as that of the troops." Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King – Commander in Chief of the Fleet and Chief of Naval Operations – said "Because the Navy shares life and death, attack and victory, with the men of the United States Merchant Marine, we are fully aware of their contribution to the victory which must come." General of the Army Douglas MacArthur states "I wish to commend to you the valor of the Merchant Seamen participating with us in the liberation of the Philippines. With us, they have shared the heaviest enemy fire.

On the islands I have ordered them off their ships and into foxholes when their ships became untenable targets of attack. At our side they have suffered in bloodshed and in death... They have contributed tremendously to our success. I hold no branch in higher esteem than the Merchant Marine Service. And the head of the draft, General Hershey, said "Service in the Merchant Marine was tantamount to the other Services."

I am one of those that started sailing after August 15, 1945 and there are those among you who seem to feel that I don't deserve full Veteran status. I say nonsense. I do not know any in this group that enlisted after August 15, 1945. We all enlisted during a hot shooting war with no knowledge of an atomic bomb that might bring an early end to the war. When I enlisted on July 13th, 1945 at the age of 17, I was given a Service number and issued a dog tag. Who has the power to issue Service numbers besides the United States government during wartime? I think you'll agree nobody. I think you will also agree that if you were issued a Service number and a dog tag, you would consider yourself part of the Armed Forces and expect to be treated and honored as a veteran when the war ended. So why weren't our Service numbers honored and our training time counted? More shameful treatment.